

Jawhar Sircar's letter is a live bomb. Can Mamata Banerjee defuse it?

Shikha Mukerjee

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, aka Didi, has been put in the dock by the resignation of Trinamool Congress (TMC) Rajya Sabha Member of Parliament Jawhar Sircar. Ironically, the formal letter to quit has not been handed over to Jagdeep Dhankhar, vice president and chairperson of the Rajya Sabha.

Dhankhar, as governor of West Bengal, was searing in his criticism of the state government for abuse of power, and widespread corruption; and declared that there was a constitutional breakdown of law and order. The content of [Sircar's letter](#) is confirmation from within the top echelons of the TMC that corruption and abuse of power are widespread.

The letter is a live bomb that Banerjee must either defuse or it will explode under her chair. It reveals the deep disappointment with Didi, for failing to take the initiative in her characteristic style, her mismanagement in failing to rein in corruption by a coterie of doctors and bureaucrats, and stop the 'dadagiri' that is, intimidation by TMC strong men.

The no-confidence expressed in the letter is a political windfall of unprecedented magnitude for the principal opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). That, however, is the unintended consequence of Sircar's open letter released through social media.

His dilemma is reflected in his disappointment and his anxiety that the popular discontent would lead to a political backlash against the TMC that, in turn, would benefit the BJP. The act of political "self immolation", he declared, has a purpose; it is to make the TMC understand that "the only bulwark against communal takeover will collapse" because people are on the warpath over the rape and murder of the trainee doctor at R G Kar Medical College and Hospital.

The letter reveals a persistent paradox in the public mobilisation calling for justice. It exposes the quandary of a public that wants a deep clean-up of the administration, including the police, and an end to the nexus between power brokers close to the TMC and the government, but refuses to name its choice for an alternative.

That there appears to be disillusionment with all political parties is evident in the 'apolitical' identity of the protests. Rallyists have not surged to support the BJP or for that matter the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)); politically organised mobilisations have not been converted into massive meetings nor have they shaped themselves into a movement, as yet.

Sircar is not the only TMC MP to speak up for and support the public's demand for justice. From Sukhendu Shekhar Roy from the Rajya Sabha to Abhishek Banerjee, the party's national general secretary and Mamata Banerjee's heir apparent, the demand has been the same — a free and fair investigation, nailing the culprits, and proactive intervention by the chief minister. Even TMC spokesperson Kunal Ghosh has been open in expressing his disappointment with how his leader has handled the situation.

Every institution and political party are suspect in popular perception that is convinced that there is an all-pervasive nexus between corruption, abuse of power, and the political establishment. The all-cats-are-black-in-the-dark syndrome reduces the choice that the aggrieved must make to a toss-up between the lesser of two evils.

For Sircar, the choice is simple, because he made a conscious decision to fight against the

authoritarian, communally-divisive majoritarian, corrupt Hindutva politics personified by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP. For voters without an ideological commitment to secularism or the finer points of democracy and a constitutionally mandated separation of powers between the executive, legislature, and judiciary, the choice between two evils could result in the BJP coming to power in West Bengal in the next Assembly election due in 2026.

Does this mean that the participants in the rally and those who are swayed by Sircar's criticism of Mamata Banerjee are all potentially swing voters? As members of the educated bhadralok class to which Sircar belongs, many have held, up until now, distinct political preferences. The question is will these voters take a risk, as they did in 2011 when they voted the familiar CPI(M)-led Left Front out and supported the TMC, by giving the BJP a chance?

The cliché a year and a half is a long time in politics sums up the situation in West Bengal, for voters and for the political leadership. The probabilities are limited; by 2026, the Mamata Banerjee government could be rejected as the CPI(M) once was, and a new party could come to power, or the TMC could remain in power. Even if she seems to be floundering, the ball is in Didi's court, and she must figure out how to play it.

Shikha Mukerjee Is a Kolkata-based senior journalist.

(Disclaimer: The views expressed above are the author's own. They do not necessarily reflect the views of DH).

Follow us on :

Follow Us

[Read More](#)